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ON PAGE A2THE WASHINGTON POST
26 January 1982

Vietnam Era's Only Convicted Spies Start Terms

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They were the Vietnam War era's only convicted spies, caught stealing U.S. documents for the Communists in a classic espionage case that had intrigue, romance, code names and surveillance personally approved by the president.

In the best modern spy thriller tradition, it also was a case laced with ambiguities. And Operation "Magic Dragon," as the FBI called it, had no heroes.

Yesterday, after 3½ years of fruitless appeals, the two men—David Truong, onetime antiwar activist and Stanford-educated intellectual, and Ronald L. Humphrey, a former United States Information Agency employee—played out the final scene in Alexandria, the site of their highly publicized trial in 1978.

Rebuffed earlier this month by the Supreme Court, which refused to consider their claims of unconstitutional government behavior, Humphrey and Truong surrendered to U.S. marshals and were driven away separately in handcuffs and leg shackles to begin serving 15-year prison terms.

Neither spoke to or looked at the other. Both men said in recent interviews they have not communicated since the trial, although they lived within a few miles of each other, Truong near Dupont Circle and Humphrey in Arlington. "I felt he deceived me," says Humphrey, a balding, 46-year-old ex-bureaucrat who was a USIA communications watch officer trying desperately to free the woman he loved from Communist-run postwar Vietnam when he first met Truong in Washington.

It was the bright, sophisticated Truong, many involved in the case agree, who played the major role in the relationship between the two men. "I don't believe we ever tapped Humphrey's phone because Truong was the spy and Humphrey was the feeder," says former U.S. Attorney William B. Cummings, who led the prosecution.

"I think that I was a very vulnerable target and they [the Justice Department] just decided to go after me," says Truong, the 36-year-old son of a man who ran for president of Vietnam in 1967 on a peace ticket. "I don't hold anything against Humphrey. He does what he thinks is important in his life and I do mine."

Truong was forwarding books, pamphlets and, most importantly, Humphrey's USIA documents by courier to Vietnamese associates in Paris at the time of Vietnam-U.S. talks on normalizing postwar relations when the FBI arrested both men. The courier, it turned out, was a CIA agent known by the code name "Keyseat."

The arrests followed the first foreign intelligence security investigation in which a president—Jimmy Carter—approved warrantless electronic surveillance including video tape cameras hidden in the ceilings at USIA and wiretaps and a microphone planted at Truong's apartment.

Truong, who maintained he trafficked only in information commonly known in foreign policy circles and frequently leaked by Washington officials, used his surrender for a news conference on the courthouse steps.

"At a time when our constitutional rights are being violated and eroded by this administration, I firmly believe that the injustice being done to me will be heard now more loudly and clearly, here and abroad, than ever before," Truong said as his American wife and about 30 supporters looked on.

As he spoke, Humphrey, dressed in a frayed red jacket and carrying an overnight bag, slipped unnoticed by most reporters through a side door with his Vietnamese wife, Kim, the woman whose plight in Communist Vietnam was an important element in her future husband's in-

When Saigon fell in April 1975, Truong was left behind and Humphrey, then in Washington, began frantic efforts to get her out.

During a visit to the Vietnamese-American Reconciliation Center, a Truong-created interest group in the District of Columbia, Humphrey made Truong's acquaintance. Soon he was visiting Truong's apartment at 2000 F St. NW and bringing copies of diplomatic cable traffic—much of it classified confidential or secret—with him.

"It wasn't long after he began dealing with Truong that [Kim] came out," says Cummings. "We made a big thing about that [at the trial]."

Humphrey now says he believes that Truong's influence in freeing her was minimal. "It turned out he never did anything," he says. Humphrey says Swedish and West German diplomats and the International Red Cross assisted Kim's release.

In the meantime, a Vietnamese woman named Dung Krall, CIA code name "Keyseat," had infiltrated the Truong-Humphrey connection. Acting as Truong's courier, prosecutors say Krall was given a letter for Truong early in 1977 by Vietnamese close to their country's negotiators in Paris.

With President Carter's personal approval, the letter was opened by U.S. counterintelligence officers. On the strength of its contents—Cummings says it contained instructions on further information-gathering—a warrantless wiretap was placed on Truong's telephone. And that, in turn, led to Humphrey.

"Really, [during] the whole Vietnam period I assumed I was watched," says Truong. "I didn't question [Krall's] motives until very much later when she was pretty nervous about what she did."

"This is just like a rerun of the war in miniature," he adds. "The CIA, which was running her, had an agent that was, in every sense of the word, greedy for money and the